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CIA-trained Cubans reported running drugs

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Some anti-Castro Cubans trained by the CIA during the Kennedy administration have used their skills in drug smuggling, the St. Petersburg Times reported Sunday.

Cuban exiles who joined the secret war against Castro between 1961 and 1964 became experts on radar detection, infrared equipment and starlight scopes, ex-CIA commando Grayston Lynch told the newspaper.

Lynch, 58, retired and living in Tampa, said some of his trainees "were actively sought out by other people in the drug trade, because of their expertise."

"When I'm talking about expertise, let me put it this way: Some of them made over 100, 20, 300 missions to Cuba," said Lynch, who says he was involved in 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, trained anti-Castro agents secretly in South Florida

from 1961 to 1963 and was assigned to the Drug Enforcement Administration in 1971.

One of their main tasks was smuggling men and weapons in and out of Cuba.

Two of six men convicted March 26 in the "Operation Sunburn" marijuana-smuggling case were trained by the CIA in the early 1960s, the newspaper said. State and federal authorities said the six

defendants in that case had hauled \$300 million worth of Colombian marijuana to Florida and Georgia over four years.

When the United States dismantled its South Florida-based anti-Castro operation, some highly trained Cubans moved into the booming marijuana and cocaine business, the newspaper said.

"They [had been] going in against the most heavily patrolled coast that I've ever heard of," Lynch said. Cracking the thin coastal defenses against drug smuggling, Lynch said, was "absolutely child's play."

One of the Operation Sunburn defendants, Antonio "Tony" Bascaro of Miami, was trained by the CIA as a pilot for secret flights

over Cuba in 1961. Gustavo "Papito" Fernandez of Key West, used his CIA past as evidence of his character during defense testimony in the Sunburn trial. He was convicted and sentenced to 50 years in prison.

Fernandez's 20-man infiltration squad, recruited in 1960, was one of the CIA's first in Florida, according to Lynch. At least one-fifth of the members of Fernandez's unit have since been jailed on charges ranging from drug smuggling to terrorism and murder.

The CIA's initial anti-Castro recruiting program let in some questionable trainees, said Lynch. Later squads, he said, were more tightly screened.